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News & Commentary from the Artvoice Editorial staff

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[Collins Inflates Debt Numbers](#)

Filed under: [Erie County Local Politics](#) — Tags: [Chris Collins](#), [mark poloncarz](#) — Geoff Kelly @ 9:37 am

The headline above is no less partisan than this one, which the editors of the *Buffalo News* have given to Janice Habuda's article about Erie County Executive's election-year debt reduction plan:

Collins plans to cut \$196 million from debt by 2015

Buried in that story is the response to the Collins plan from Erie County Comptroller Mark Poloncarz, the Democrat who is challenging Collins in November. Yesterday afternoon, Poloncarz released this parsing of the numbers Collins offers to justify his claims that he has already substantially reduced county debt:

Today, Erie County Comptroller Mark Poloncarz issued the following statement in response to the Collins administration's claims that he will have reduced Erie County's (the "County") long-term debt by nearly \$200 million by 2015, including \$143 million by the start of 2012.

"This is yet another example of the Collins administration's reliance on 'smoke and mirrors' to artificially inflate numbers in an attempt to mislead the public. The fact of the matter is that the vast majority of his supposed \$200 million in debt reduction by 2015 is completely made up."

"First, Collins overstates his numbers by including more than \$37 million in debt retired in 2007, the year before he even took office. He didn't retire a single dollar of that debt. Its inclusion is wholly inappropriate and is lumped in to help inflate his numbers. The reality is that in January 2008, when Collins took office, the County's debt stood at \$525 million, not \$562 million.

"Second, although he would like to pretend that more than \$100 million in debt related to the Erie County Medical Center Corporation ("ECMC") is 'off the County books,' the County is still legally obligated to guarantee that debt, must identify it under New York State law as a long-term outstanding indebtedness obligation of the County, and we would be forced to pay it if ECMC were to ever default. Furthermore, while Collins continually boasts about taking 'Erie County out of the hospital business,' County taxpayers are still on the hook for more than \$16 million a year as part of the settlement.

"When looking at the real debt numbers, starting with the actual County debt when Collins took office (\$525 million) and the actual debt as of the end of 2010 (\$546 million), the reality is Chris Collins didn't reduce debt by a single dollar in his first three years in office, but actually increased it by more than \$20 million.

"Only this year has the County's debt been reduced. And, while Collins claims that by the start of 2012 he will have reduced the County's debt by \$143 million, when you dig a little deeper, that \$143 million is really only about \$10 million."

Poloncarz's numbers are correct; to claim that \$100 million for ECMC as debt reduction is pure nonsense. The Collins campaign released a rebuttal to Poloncarz's statement, but all that rebuttal amounted to was an insistence that the \$100 million counts as debt reduction, without offering an argument why, and then a couple diversionary attacks on Poloncarz.

UPDATE: I realize that I shouldn't single out the News on this; at least they included Poloncarz's response. On radio and TV yesterday I heard reports that

repeated Collins' claims unquestioningly